

January 29, 2015 CDC Ebola Response Update

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Larry Thomas] CDC's lab work in countries affected by the Ebola epidemic has played a critical role in diagnosing cases early, and quickly getting patients with Ebola into Ebola treatment units. One such lab is located in Bo, Sierra Leone. In November, the first all-female team to staff the lab arrived—just as the number of cases of Ebola started escalating and the number of samples being sent to the lab for testing increased. Tara Sealy was the team lead, and having been in Sierra Leone in August, she saw an immediate difference in workload.

[Tara Sealy] When I went in November, the sample numbers had increased significantly because cases had increased significantly. We averaged about 96 samples a day. I think our highest day was 162 samples.

[Larry Thomas] In August, their equipment could only run 15 samples at once. When Tara arrived, the equipment was updated with a robotic system that could test more than 90 samples at a time. Now they were able to get results back to doctors in remote locations in hours, not days. This was critical, not only for patients who tested positive for Ebola, but also for patients who tested negative for Ebola and who were kept in holding centers until the test results came back.

[Tara Sealy] The biggest problem is making sure that people who ultimately test negative for Ebola aren't going to get infected while they're sitting there waiting, because they could very well be sitting next to someone who is positive.

[Larry Thomas] Tara and her colleagues broke records for the number of tests completed during their 30-day deployment—running more than 2,700 Ebola tests. Several factors were involved—they had more cases, they had the robotic machine to boost their daily workload, and they started getting samples from areas that used to be an eight-hour car ride away.

[Tara Sealy] It was the first time that they started delivering samples to us via helicopter. So three days a week we had samples that were delivered to us on the United Nations helicopter. They stopped in two remote areas of Sierra Leone and picked up samples.

[Larry Thomas] Since the team's return, cases in Sierra Leone have started to decrease in some areas. Tara hopes their work played a role.

[Tara Sealy] Being able to test as many samples as we were able to test in a 24-hour period and get the results back to the facilities within a 24-hour turnaround time is crucial.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.